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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001350

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: WHY THE VOTE WENT SOUTH

REF: A. ANKARA 1345

[B](#). ANKARA 418

[C](#). ANKARA 808

[D](#). ANKARA 1325

[E](#). ANKARA 1266

[F](#). ANKARA 1346

[G](#). ANKARA 1341

[H](#). ANKARA 618

[I](#). ANKARA 1303

(U) Classified by Ambassador W. Robert Pearson. Reason:
1.5(b)(d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: Ref A reported the March 1 defeat in Parliament of the AK Government's petition to permit deployment of U.S. troops to Turkey. A number of factors contributed to the outcome, primarily: 1) the secular Turkish State's fears about USG intention in Iraq; 2) a strong desire to bring the Islam-oriented AK to its knees (ref B); and 3) the internal political dynamics, rivalries, and ineptitude within AK itself. The AK Government is now badly shaken, AK leader Erdogan and P.M. Gul humiliated, and US-Turkish relations under severe strain. Erdogan signaled publicly March 2 that the defeated proposal will not be revived, but that the Government is considering other unspecified alternatives. Most likely, these will have to wait until at least March 11; Erdogan is running for Parliament in the March 9 special election in Siirt province, a prelude to his eventual assumption of the prime ministership. End summary.

"The Enemy"

[2](#). (C) AK and Public Opinion: strong anti-war sentiments dominated the Turkish public, media, and held sway in the legislature on both sides of the aisle (including AK), proving to be too much for an inexperienced AK Government/Party to manage. AK leader Erdogan showed little of the decisive leadership on which he prides himself; he did too little, too late to sway the voters and his parliamentary group. P.M. Gul's high-profile regional diplomatic efforts to find a "peaceful solution" to the crisis won AK kudos from the voters but also hardened the resolve of anti-war voices in the public, the Turkish State, and AK itself. A number of intellectuals across the spectrum had argued that Turkey could spike the US war effort with a no vote. In the aftermath, they trumpeted the outcome as a victory for democracy.

[3](#). (C) Erdogan, Gul and the "AK Parliament": ref C reported on the rise of Parliament as an semi-independent foreign policy decision making node under the leadership of Speaker Bulent Arinc, an AK heavyweight and rival to Erdogan and Gul. Arinc's outspoken cooperation with both President Sezer and the opposition CHP -- which voted en masse to reject -- undermined AK party discipline and emboldened fence sitters to side against their party leadership. Minutes after the vote, a senior AK member and a well-connected former NSC staffer separately observed to us privately that a rejectionist appeal by former Islamist P.M. Erdogan to his many one-time followers and sympathizers in the AK cadre also helped spook some AK members.

-- On behalf of the Party of Ataturk, senior CHP official Onder Sav -- who Arinc pointedly granted procedurally dubious leeway to speak on substantive issues -- charged that the USG in engaging in a "disgusting and shameful war" and declared that U.S. ships off Iskenderun belong to "the enemy."

-- A well-connected former M.P. who had visited the floor shortly before the vote related to us afterwards that Erdogan and Gul, acutely aware of public and AK intramural sensitivities and hoping to outflank parliamentary and Turkish State rivals, had tried to engineer a close but successful vote by allowing a number of their colleagues to side with the opposition. "They miscalculated," he said.

-- Contacts in AK and elsewhere note that the AK group is now wracked with tension and divided, at least for now, between Erdogan-Gul and Arinc. While observers say that this may not ultimately lead to the break-up of AK, it poses a serious management problem for Erdogan in particular.

Killing Two Birds with One Stone

14. (C) Turkish NSC issued a noncommittal statement after its Feb. 28 meeting designed, our contacts say, to keep the heat on the AK Government and Parliament by depriving them the cover of an ecumenical "State" commitment to support the USG (ref D). Moreover, as reported ref E, Turkey's powerful generals in recent days allowed the impression to build of their "concern" that the AK Government was "rushing" Parliament to a vote; although they issued a denial, this came hard on the heels of months of military criticism of AK for foot-dragging on a "political" decision the General Staff (TGS) claimed it needed to act. In fact, the military had simultaneously encouraged the Government to make maximal demands on the U.S. while intentionally aggravating the implementation of the site preparations process, adding further tension and pressure to the mix (ref E). President Sezer, who chairs the NSC, reiterated at the 11th hour his public challenge to the constitutionality of the AK Government's petition, teaming up with the ambitious Arinc and CHP to press the case in the legislature.

-- In post-vote conversations, contacts echoed what we had been picking up before the debate: that Sezer and the generals were trying to create the impression that they were preventing AK from dragging Turkey into an unpopular war -- thereby inducing further hesitation on the part of some AK elements. (Our General Officer contacts at the TGS have been telling us for months now that the military clearly sees the imperative of total support for the U.S., but that the government must step up to its responsibility. TGS appears to have miscalculated. Our contacts expected a yes vote on March 1 and must have been surprised at the outcome.)

-- A senior journalist, the former NSC staffer, and an AK M.P. close to Erdogan noted that, in the run-up to the vote, the military was focused primarily on undermining Erdogan and AK. The journalist asserted that the military's intent was "to kill two birds with one stone" -- AK and USG policy in Iraq.

15. (C) The Kurdish issue was of abiding importance in the calculations and the surreptitious political effort led by senior elements of the military, the MFA, and its bureaucratic allies (refs F-G). This suspicion about U.S. policy toward the Kurds -- regardless of our cooperation and statements -- colors the military and bureaucracy views of our efforts; they allowed a public campaign (ref H and previous) to suggest the USG is working against Turkey with the PKK. The resurgence of tensions between Turkish security forces and ethnic Kurds in southeastern Turkey is, according to numerous Kurdish and other contacts -- including iconoclastic CHP deputies -- a direct result of the Turkish military's fears of separatism in the region (ref I and previous). There is an element of the self-fulfilling prophecy here; several Turkish Kurdish figures with ties to both Islamic (AK) and Kurdish nationalist circles had privately criticized USG policy for siding with "Kemalist Turkey." They expressed happiness that the petition failed, thereby paving the way for greater USG cooperation with Iraqi Kurds -- instead of the Turks.

What's Next?

16. (C) Erdogan signaled publicly March 2 that the Government will not revive the defeated proposal, but is considering other unspecified alternatives. Most likely, any reconsideration of U.S. deployments to Turkey will have to wait until at least March 11. On March 9, Erdogan is running for Parliament in the special election in Siirt province, a prelude to his eventual assumption of the prime ministership.

Our Turkish Friends

17. (C) The defeat in Parliament is widely understood in Ankara as tantamount to de facto vote of no confidence against a Government that has been left badly shaken. Though victim of their own leadership shortcomings and tactical ineptitude, Erdogan and Gul ultimately stepped up to the plate and at considerable risk pushed to support the USG -- only to succumb to the pressure of traditional State and political rivals and to be publicly humiliated in the process. Many of those rivals are found in the military leadership and other official circles that have long professed to be the USG's best friends in Turkey. The anti-war nexus has scored a tactical political victory while risking harm to the bilateral relationship. Whether that damage and drift can be limited or forestalled depends upon whether all elements of the corporate Turkish entity -- elected Government and unelected State alike -- pull together rather than seeking partisan advantage at a watershed moment in Turkish history.

PEARSON